

My name is Barbara Rush and I am a resident of Helena. I recently retired from teaching for 30 years in the public schools.

When I arrived in Helena in 1975 the Office of Public Instruction was housed in one building. Now it consists of three buildings and an office at the capital. Data supplied by O.P.I. Shows that state spending for education in Montana has increased from \$850 million to \$1.147 billion over the last ten years. Pupil enrollment is down and total professional staff has increased by more than 2,000 over that time period. Private education has increased in Helena. Since I arrived in Helena in 1975 I have seen the establishment of St. Andrews School as well as Rocky Mountain School. These schools continue to grow and thrive. Home schooling, which was almost unheard of, has grown greatly in the Helena area. Why is this? Why if we are spending more on education are people avoiding public education at great personal expense?

I think that I can provide you with an answer from my own personal experience. I retired because I was so frustrated, I couldn't teach anymore. I'd lost control of classroom time, students time, and of the curriculum. Our school day and our school year had become overrun by federal grants which fed so many programs and non-profits. Our schools have become cash cows rather than learning institutions. Teachers just teach when they can now having five spelling lessons in a week is almost unheard of. Teaching lessons consecutively so that there is continuity and good instruction is becoming more and more rare. Classrooms are chaos-autistic and trainable children in the halls and in the classrooms making loud noises and constantly being brought in or taken out. Gifted and talented students only attend their regular classroom four days a week and what they do during the other day does not coincide with classroom curriculum. Accelerated reading programs on the computer go on all day-printers get stuck, run out of paper, students asking constantly "I can't find my book", "Whose turn is it?", (even with a sign up sheet) class is interrupted constantly. Teachers are sent to workshops, special teachers coming in, D.A.R.E., psychologist to teach social emotional programs, playground aides to play with students (social-emotional again), buddy programs (also social-emotional), bullying program, 15 minutes everyday, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Assemblies for fine arts, to promote conservation, animal rights, bullying program again, business partners, take at least one hour twice a month. (One hour is about 25% of the school teaching day or approximately two subjects).

Parents volunteer for walking or running programs which are supposed to be at recess but often require class time, lunch time gifted and talented which also require an early lunch and much invasion and confusion, walk to school day and a barbeque (to help school lunch program boost business) puts the whole school in an uproar.

The National Guard brings in a helicopter (aside from the safety issues students are in line for an hour to see the inside). Big Brothers and Sisters takes our at risk

students out of class for at least a half hour once a week and sometimes more for special days (this again is supposed to be at lunch)- remember one half hour is a lesson-they miss spelling or math or some other subject they can't afford to miss no matter how you try to rearrange the schedule.

Artists in Residence are one hour a day for a whole week and sometimes two weeks. I don't believe that you can teach math and reading through dance-they certainly are not coordinated with the curriculum or the lesson you should be working on that day nor are the instructors certified to teach.

This is just some of what we went through-I Love to Read Day has become the whole month of February.

Teachers are out of the classroom for workshops and on committees constantly. Classroom curriculum is a decoupage of trying to implement new and unproven programs constantly, mostly to disastrous results. We had three reading programs and four math programs to implement in third grade-all with different philosophies that did not compliment each other. Teachers out of the classroom means bad lessons-no time to prepare-and loss of continuity with students.

Our schools are failing because we're about special interests and non profits. We're not about a successful America.

Let me add one more thing. The tremendous amount of Federal grants are not helping our schools, they are hindering the classroom efforts. They are like those after Christmas sales in which you get 75% off on things that you don't really want or need.

Sincerely,

Barbara Rush
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